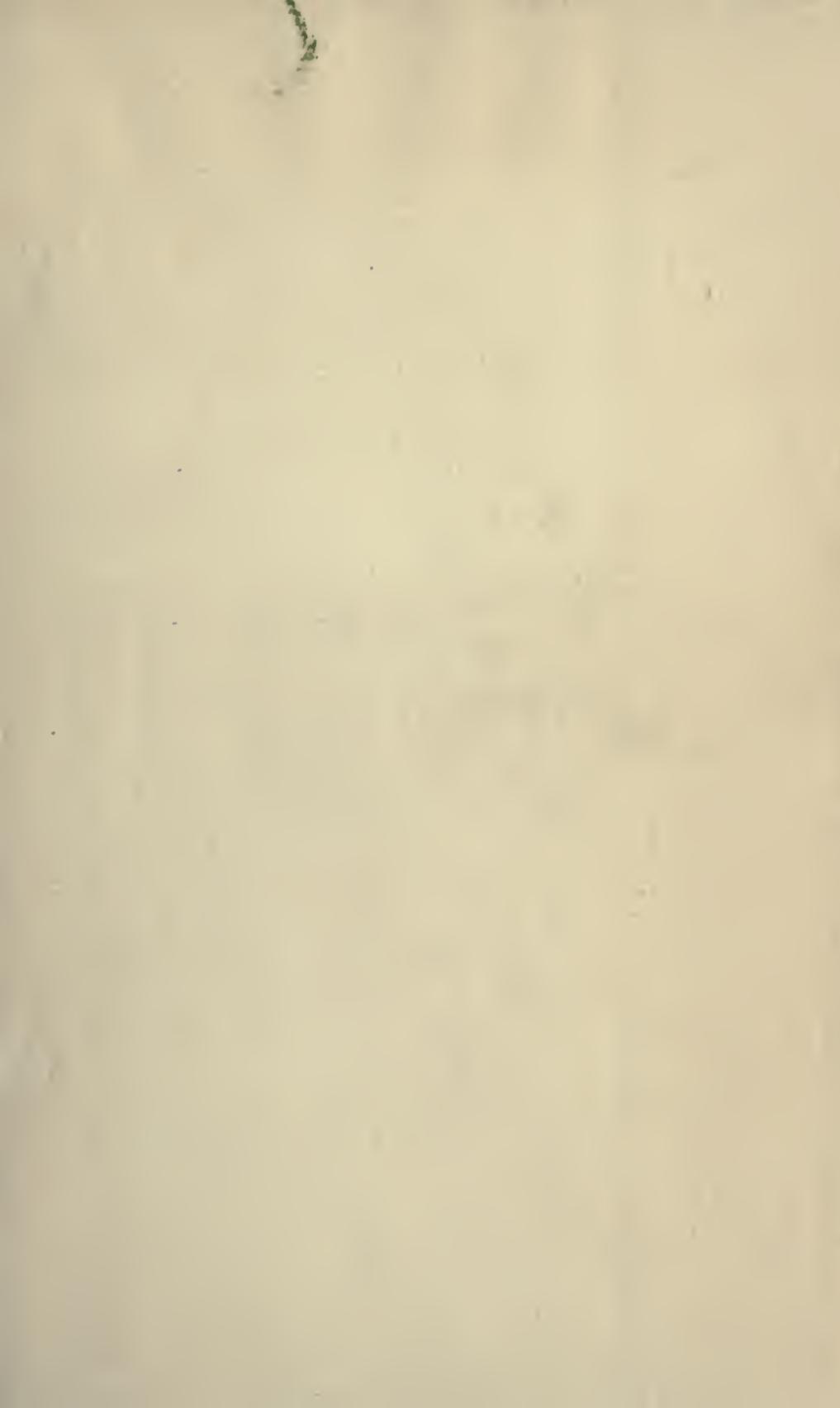


GREEN
ARRAS



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Green Arras



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GREEN ARRAS
BY
LAURENCE HOUSMAN.

LONDON: JOHN LANE
AT THE BODLEY HEAD
CHICAGO: WAY AND
WILLIAMS

1896



GENERAL

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*DEDICATION**TO CLEMENCE HOUSMAN*

*I hang my green arras before you
Of the lights and the shadows I wove :
Could the worth of my gift but restore you
One half of your watchings and love !
But faint in the threads of their story
The heads of my angels and kings,
Bowed each in its circlet of glory ;
And faint in its motion of wings
Is each bird that here sings.*

*The loves and the lives, of whose grieving
I strove to make music and day,
Lie faint on the fields of my weaving,
Half-withered and falling away ;
And faint upon delicate spaces
The looks of my women that pass :
My song is a shroud to their faces,
My verse is a veil to their glass,
My gift is but grass.*

*As grass for dead faces laid under
Unseen in sad places of earth,
As Love that with sweet lips asunder
Breathes joy on the anguish of birth,
As Faith that in gifts of far-seeing
Turns eyes from the sight of man's wrong,
So round the bare walls of Life's being,
Where failure and darkness belong,
Lies the arras of song.*

*As grass to Love's grave, as a curtain
Drawn over the dusk of Life's day,
This weaving from fingers uncertain,
This blending of colours astray :
Yet tho' Time bring the touch of the spoiler,
Or the years lay their dust on its sheen,
This gift's to the hand of the toiler,—
To make your name's music be seen
Amid arras of green.*

ERRATA.

Page 4, line 15, omit *of*.
,, 11, , omit *sprung*.
,, 22, , 1, for *and* read *to*.
,, 22, , 2, for *to* read *and*.
,, 42, , 3, for *shore* read *shores*.
,, 45, , 12, for *sign* read *sight*.
,, 65, , 7, for *is* read *in*.
,, 70, , 15, for *you* read *your*.
,, 72, , 2, for *A* read *Or*.
,, 73, , 12, for *thy* read *your*.



A SONG OF THE ROAD



OFT by mound of barrow and croft,
Upward bend from the valleying ground
Evening's mistily sandalled daughters,
Drowsily treading their westward round :
Birds awake by the wood-bound waters
Fill the heights and hollows with sound.

To the west of the hills glows a garden of rose,
And a breath of its fragrance is breathed upon me,
Warm with the heart of my Dear, that is calling
"Here, O my love, is a rose-bower for thee,—
Here where the silvery cataract's falling
Terrace on terrace toward the sea."

Fallings of light, and of waters belong to her,
Staunching of wood-song through hollows of space ;
Stars, like the Kings of the East, come and throng to her,
Jewel for her foot falls the dew to its place.
But the sound of my feet on the road is a song to her,
And the end of her prayer is my face to her face.

THE BLUE EYES OF MARGRET



HAT would I not give,
What summer noons and skies
Of the years yet left to live,
Day and night to behold her eyes !

(And spake the blue eyes of Margret,
While heart's memories met,
“Look, and forget me not yet !”)

As a cast-off glove from my hand,
I would give the gold from my brow ;
I would give the land that mine eyes behold,
Day and night, to be with her now.

(And spake the blue eyes of Margret,
While heart's memories met,
“Look : look : and forget me not yet !”)

There came a voice, which cried,
“Thus wilt thou give ? Even so
“Thy way is to her side :
“So shalt thou give, and go.”

(While spake the blue eyes of Margret,
Where heart's memories met,
“Look : look : look : and forget me not yet !”)

“Thou must give the glove from thy hand,
 “Thou must give the gold from thy brow,
 “Thou must give the land that thine eyes behold,
 “Day and night to be with her now ;
 “And summer noons and skies,
 “If thou would behold her eyes ;
 “And the years yet left to live :
 “These also thou must give.”

(And spake the blue eyes of Margret,
 While life's memories met,
 “Look : look : and forget me not yet !”)

Then I gave off my hand
 The glove that clothes the bone,
 Also from off my brow
 The gold that had there grown,
 Also the land
 Of promise, and the years,
 And all hopes and fears :
 To see, when all was done,
 A white small skeleton
 Set in a narrow grave ;
 And piteous hollow eyes,
 Looking in such strange wise,
 As a dead echo gave
 The greeting I did crave.

There spake the blue eyes of Margret,
 While heart's memories met,
 “Look : look : look : and forget me not yet !”

THE COMFORTERS



O night the sleeper,
The watcher Sorrow :
“ Be thy dreams deeper,
“ So may I borrow
“ Peace of thy peace,
“ And rest to my sorrow ! ”

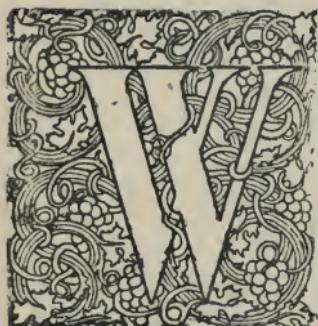
“ Peace, oh, peace ! ”
Quoth night. “ Of to-morrow
“ I am the keeper,
“ O watcher, O, Sorrow !

“ Under my breast
“ Its gold is moulden.
“ Lay thee, and rest,
“ To dreams beholden,
“ Where from of its nest
“ The dawn goes golden ! ”

To the dreamed morrow,
Sorrow, the sleeper :
“ Where may I borrow
“ New tears to my sorrow,

“To comfort my sorrow,
“Lest the wound grow deeper?
“Of sleep borne hither,
“Its well-springs wither.”
“Of me,” quoth the morrow,
“O, Sorrow, the sleeper!”

THE STOLEN MERMAID



HEN night, with hollow hand,
 Calls the sea up the land,
 I, thinking 'Art thou there at rest?'
 Watch the moon blossom down a hun-
 dred waves,
 And, through the belling surf, see half-
 suppressed

Drowned faces rise from their remembered graves.

Once I remember well,
 Where the blue hung like a bell,
 As the gulls rose and fell,
 How rocked below the brine
 Thy face looked up to mine :
 And could arms reach,
 And those dreamed lips have speech—
 O, clasping arms that never come unwound,
 O, lips made unforgetable,
 From long sea-burial released to sound !

Land-bound I watch for thee
 By the soundings of the sea,
 While the wind sweeps from the cliff,
 And the downward tide descends
 To the bay's beds and ends,
 And the solitudes where friends
 Once lived and toiled the summer wave-weeds through.
 Ah, there, Beloved, if
 Thou livest as we once were used to do,
 Tasting the tides that from great fountains drove
 Past our couch-chamber-cave :

Come up the blossoming alleys of the foam,
 The white and scentless alleys of moon-flower,
 That lace the footsteps of the travelling moon ;
 And linger here an hour,
 Bruising the landside with thy burdenous tune,
 And sing me my lost home !

Sing our sea-haunts, where lips no more divide,
 In sudden sunderings of song,
 The sea-meshed melodies that wound each tide
 (O, cheek by wet cheek's side !)
 Red weed-bowers among !

Over bright hollows where the dropped winds lie,
 Drenched on with dews, like honey-burdened bees,
 Too heavy laden from their wanderings
 To weigh a pinion further : in sweet things,
 Where scent lags thickest, and in topmost trees,
 Where song-birds slumber, let thy song come by !

And straightway they shall waken, and shall hear ;
Till on their hearts shall come the cold moon-fear,
 And there shall grow a wrestling of sharp pain,
 And all a seaward-flying wish to be
In bright lands over-sea ;
So shall that hunger take their wings amain
 And cast them forth, an offering to thee,
Out of this dark dry land.
Then, O, my Merman, reach a murderous hand,
 And wring those throats that day-long weary me !





ANTÆUS



OWN in her darkness felt the Earth
 The feet go by of one, whose birth
 Claimed her his mother: when, as
 dumb,
 Those foot-falls stayed, she whispered
 from

The inmost places of her womb,

“ How so, Beloved, art thou come ? ”

And he : “ Do not my feet lie bare

“ Upon thy breast ? Thou knowest where

“ I am, sweet Mother, and of whom

“ I hail that speak. Yea, from thy loom

“ My raiment is ; my locks are bound

“ With foster-brethren of the ground,

“ Sown by the burial of the rains.”

She said “ Thou seest the level plains,

“ The hills, and the all-folding blue

“ Of heaven, and those high wells of dew



“ Wind-drifted o'er it chariot-wise :
 “ Let me have speech of them, sweet eyes,
 “ Yea, through thine eyes to me teach sight :
 “ Lean near my heart and tell me ! ”

“ It is night,”

Antæus answered her, “ All stars show fair,
 “ Light-studded, harnessing the crystal air ;
 “ Wind stirs the tree-tops, but it stirs not these :
 “ They look, and see my Father's palaces
 “ Shine in blue fathoms underneath the bay :
 “ There with long wands like pilgrims enter they,
 “ And feast.”

Therewith he ceased ;
 And through her veiling leaves she found his breath
 And kisses on her, and made sure that death
 Touched him not yet. Then said he: “ Strength of thee
 “ I come to draw, as the Hyblæan bee
 “ Draws honey in the brakes of Sicily.
 “ Oft times he comes, and each time finds fresh wells
 “ Of sustenance on seaward-dipping fells :
 “ So come I, Mother, to gain strength of thee.”
 “ Yea,” answered she, “ of me ! ”

And silence, like a shroud between them, drew
 His face from hers, till suddenly she knew
 Trample, and tread, and fierce contending beat
 Of terrible feet.



Then fear divine made manifest,
To loud heart-leapings in her breast,
A fierce earth-vintage that ran pressed,
Foot-beaten from her blood like wine :
With starting saps, and flame-like dew,
Lava of love, and travailing fire,
Strivings of fear, and strong desire,
She succoured the loved feet she knew :
Clasped them—and felt, at sudden spur, how sprung
Victory among
The enlacing limbs for him, and on the foe sprung
Downfall and overthrow :
Lost them, and felt her son mown like a wave
Down to her breast ; and, at each summons, gave
With panic-smitten heart : he rose, he dropt,
Leapt upward, overtopped
His fate, and cried victoriously in air.
She heard : another cry went strangling to despair ;
Then, on a sudden, all the conflict stopt.

Down, down, prone down,
Onto the dear brown
Breast from which he was born :
Bent, rent, all spent, the forlorn
Blind mother held him again ;
Asking, ever in vain,
Of that Unknown, news of her own.
“Your form is fair,”
She sighed : “there are flowers in your hair,

“ And the smell of your raiment is sweet.
“ I had hold of his feet.
“ He left me ; I heard how his cry
“ Of conquest rang scaling the sky ;
“ Then to my side
“ You dropped, you surrendered, you died.
“ You, I say, were his foe,
“ You, and he laid you low :
“ You, whom I do not know.”

But when she drew him down
Into her earth-breast brown,
Heart knew heart. “ Oh ! undone ! ”
She wept, “ You, you were my son ! ”

THE GAZING FAUN



VER his head goes a murmur of trees;
 In the stream the trees sway, but the
 murmur of these
 Is lost in the murmur of waters that
 bound,
 Like an echo asleep, the return of the
 sound.

Over his head dark swallow-wings pass,
 Underfoot ground-swallows dart in the grass;
 And its water-mate starts through the stream, when the
 gloss
 Of a golden-billed blackbird slips songless across.

His birds learn the faces of flowers, as they fly,
 His flowers learn the songs of the birds that go by:
 They see not, they know not the wings that draw near,
 But the song is a fragrance that speaks, and they hear.

And he dreams how below the stream's surface a bird
 Flies fluting: wild droppings of music are heard;
 Winds float and boughs sway with a magical tone,
 And they see a world over them, still, as their own

To the world is above. And his image sees there
The Faun looking down through his long dropping hair,
Looking wistfully down for a Naiad, who passed
Slow-armed up the stream when he gazed in it last.

He started: for, ah! round his faun-fellow there,
Long silvery fingers stolen up through the hair
Caressed the white throat; and at once, in a mist
Of swung waters, the sad face leapt back to be kissed.

And the Naiad who clasped him still clasping him rose
In a tremulous vision, with eyes upon those
Of her lover above. Then the woods and the air
Grew dim to his sense; in his long dropping hair

The playing of waters a coronal wound,
Melodic with ripples and tendrils of sound;
And his body bent down, like a shadow at sway
Of the clasping white arms where his stream-image lay,
To her kiss; and behold, the world melted away!

In his ears there once more went the murmur of trees;
Overhead the trees swayed, but the murmur of these
Lay lost in the murmur of waters, that bound,
Like an echo entranced, the return of the sound.

THE WATER-GHOSTS



RIGHT shimmering faces drift and rise,
And sweep and throw,
Like sleep, from shadowy hair and
eyes

The watery death, the dear surprise,
That drew their bodies in still wise
To the nymph's bed below.

Broad pools of light from yon large moon
Lie on the hollows and the bends
Of their great bodies, and the ends
Of the dark limbs are licked with light.

There, where the bathers bathe in tune,
And all the waters wash the moon,
Love's pilgrim to the breast of friends,
I blend into their dream to-night.

Did not the water drown you, then,
That drew your bodies from the shore?
Ye were the fairest sons of men;
And yet the deep wave folded o'er
Breasts, and bright feet and hands, and bore
The quiet bubbles up to air
That, for an ending of all care,

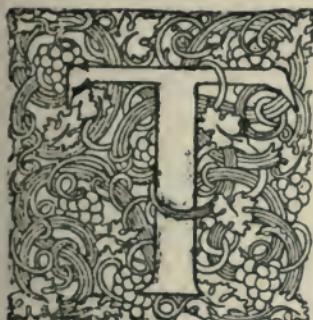
Broke like a death-kiss to the night.
Still to the perilous delight

Your quiet spirits shift and glide ;
Your white arms sever and unite,
Your pale hands open and divide ;
Yet, though ye seek her far and wide,
The elusive love withholds from sight !

These are the water-ghosts of men
Long gone, the bathers that are sped ;
Yea, they have found the Naiad's bed :
Smooth are her shoulders to the head
That rests thereon,
And smooth her lips : they do not ken
That she, she also, she is dead.

The full moon blossoms to the tide,
And suddenly the dreams divide
That hold them quiet in their bed :
And up their gracious bodies slide
Into the moonlight to be fed
By love again ; they do not wis
How cold, how dead the face they miss.

SPRING SONG



THROUGH the clear air the morning
lends,
A fervent spirit stirs along ;
Her coming as a rain-shower blends
Blown hair and windy song.

She fills us with a waking want,
A wonder that we have not wings :
The wind leans down upon her chant,
So fairly she sings.

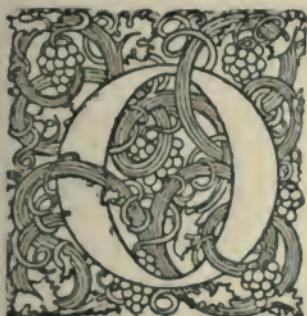
She breathes a soft tumultuous song
Along the channel of her reeds ;
Low goes the wind the woods among,
And flower-heads flush the meads.

Let down, let down, Oh ! weary earth,
Thy load of griefs into the sea !
Be mother to the voice of mirth,
That calleth unto thee !

Her feet are on thy water-sheds ;
Her cry runs forth in all thy hills ;
She makes a babbling in the beds
Of many sounding rills.

Launch forth, O Day-spring, on the sea,
Thy golden raft across the waves ;
The voices of the vast sea-caves
Are waking mumurously.

AUTUMN



VER her dreaming face she flings
Forgetfulness, nor seems to hear,
Above the waning of her year,
A passing sob of wood-doves' wings.

As one, that in a magic swoon,
Remembering not slow time's advance,
Might find her face o'er-brushed perchance
Of bat-wings at the bud of moon,

And say, with murmur of her lips,
“ Low fly the swallows in the sun :
“ I will awake when heat is done,
“ And all the weary daylight dips.”

Even so she sleeps ; and wakes aware
Only at parting of her joys,
When the wood's multitudinous voice
Goes chilled and chidden through the air.

Then all her shining visage thrills
With pain, crowned round with shattered gold ;
Her gracious hands unlock their hold
On all the purple leaning hills.

And wood-sprites learn a sudden lore
From that wild death upon her face ;
And, as they strip her empty place,
White strangers foot it to the door.

LOVE-BOUNDED TIME

"So the world forbids!
 "There, love, there,
 "Soft eyes and lids,
 "And cheek age-cold!
 "Here's white come unaware
 "In the soft-sheened hair,
 "I am young, you are old;
 "And the world forbids!"



OVER'S tale of treasure trove,
 Hear how once, in spells that wove
 Day with night, stood Time-bound
 Love.

At his feet two dreamers lay :
 One was golden-haired as day,
 But the woman's hair was grey.

Yet across Love's bounden feet,
 Like blown corn and meadow-sweet
 Did the gold and silver meet.

And Love sang a patient tune,
 Lit with melodies of noon,
 Under Love's late harvest-moon :

“ Love and His true worshippers :—
Youth was his, to age was hers,
Time built up forbidding years.

“ Such true hearts were never found :
Star to star their search went round,
Met,—and lo, Love’s feet were bound.

“ Yet for them in dreams that rhyme
Underneath Love’s perfect chime,
They take hold on Love-bound Time.

“ In my sleep-enchanted house,
Dreaming under fastened brows,
They fulfil their marriage vows.”

Thus sang Father Love, and drew
Tender hands across the two,
Saying, “ Is this they dream not true ?

“ Truth to truth may faithless be,
Seeming seem more truth than she,
Being but the truth set free.

“ Beauty may to beauty err,
Yet her counterfeit aver
All that beauty lost in her.

“ Life may wound sweet life to death ;
Joy teach joy she tarrieth ;
Truest life least sorroweth.

“ Things that are may all be naught,
Falsehood fact too loosely wrought,
Truth the still-born child of thought.

“ So for these: in dreams that rhyme,
Underneath Love’s perfect chime,
They have hold on Love-bound Time.”

LOSS AND GAIN



LOISTERED Truth, to Thee we send
 Many a mild ambassador ;
 Heroes, whom our hearts attend,
 And bright Knights
 Who have risen like stars in war.
 Oh, the ringing way they ride !
 How they toil, endure, abide,
 Scale what heights,
 'Scape what deaths in wrestling to Thy side !

By Thy love Thou leadest them
 Up life's barriers and beyond,
 By the flutter of skirt's hem,
 By surmise
 Of swept grass or trodden frond ;
 Ah, they halloo from the wood !
 Lo, then, Thou, with hair in hood,
 Bandaged eyes,
 Bitterly art met, not understood.

Oh, the piteous long return !
 Oh, the baffled vizored brow,
 Which aforetime so did burn !
 Many a dint

Dulls the golden harness now ;
 And much dust defiles the lance ;
 And across the troubled glance
 Lies the imprint
 Wisdom lays on conscious ignorance.

Yet once more they must essay,
 World-worn wanderers, up the pass.
 Near the ending of Life's day,
 There fare out
 Many such, who turn, alas,
 Dimming eyes towards its sun,
 Saying " Ere the day be done,
 " Have no doubt,
 " If we find Her, she will smile on one."

Soft, Her presence is aware.
 Now they draw to her, and now
 Touch the ripples of her hair
 (What! So kind ?),
 And the imagined sunlight of her brow :
 Touch, yet, ah, with hands distressed,
 Sunlit Truth ; for, at the test
 They are blind ;
 Nor can see the Face that bids them rest.



INSPIRATION



N those high heads, since first Prometheus came
 Fire-bearing, drops the everlasting wrong,
 From his rent side, kindling the brain to song ;
 And man, Heaven's outraged vassal, meant for mirth,
 Sees Sappho, as a flame,
 Burn up the stairway of the gods to earth.

For Truth is that which without Knowledge dwells,
 And Beauty that which beyond Nature is :
 And Truth and Beauty weave the charm which spells
 Eyes blind, ears deaf, and dumb the lips they kiss.

And Truth outbides all search, though for her sake
 The searcher dies ;
 And herein Beauty lies,
 That Nature hath for her no complement ;
 Her voice is Echo's voice of discontent,
 Heart-broken that it hath no heart to break.

Her odours, blind to Heaven's dear lights, obey
Their call from ground :
Her sweet sight faints for sound,
As that drowned, parching face Narcissus saw
Within the waters pine from day to day,
Dying, because its beauty had no flaw.

Thus it hath been, and ever shall be thus,
That Beauty is to be unsatisfied ;
And Truth as one, who, sleeping at death's side,
Awoke, and felt the dead man amorous.

THE STOPS OF LOVE



HAT love might be, one knew
 As a fair tune fit and true,
 From a flute, where the breath that blew,
 Flowing tremulously through,
 Made sound too sweet, too sweet for the
 red lips' play
 To be ever drawn away ;
 Too sweet for the tongue to will
 Ever to take her fill
 Of speech, or aught but this :
 Sweet sounds, sweet sounds, along the long melodious
 throat to kiss !

Love leads the lips to play
 One tune through the whole day ;
 And when it is most gay,
 He taketh the sense away,
 Ah, then, to the flower-like flute
 Would we not cry " Be mute !
 " " Flute, with your honeyed tone ;
 " Now that the honeyed sense of it is flown, is
 flown, is flown ! "

But the ripened flute still plays,
Melodious with self-praise,
The sound of the lost days.

Then Love is known :

Like a prayer that is worn away
On the lips of them that pray :
Worn, with a strange decay,
Into a dead tongue, severed of its day.

Till the living hearts forget
What it is that they pray ; and yet
Cling on, cling on to a meant ritual of pain,
Bowing in bitter need
At the throne of a dead creed,
Where the corpse of a God sits slain !

THE GARDEN OF LIFE



IFE said, " For Love's sweet sake
 " I will a garden make,
 " Where my dear lord shall take
 " "Sweets without measure."
 So, with the garden made,
 Love entered in and played;
 And this or that way swayed
 Life to his pleasure.

But when Love came to die,
 He beat the roses by,
 He piled his death-bed high
 Of blossoms broken.
 And all the spoiled boughs sway.
 "Good luck!" they wail and say,
 "For sweet Love's gentle play,
 " And Love's sweet token."

When Life came there to die
 She put the roses by,
 She made a place to lie
 Away with sorrow.

While the sad blossoms fell,
Quoth she, " Ah, Love did well,
" No more on sweets to dwell,
" That fade to-morrow ! "

Had Life no joy of Love ?
Should not her sorrow prove
He was most sweet above
 Her sweet breast breeding ?
Was Love not kind to Life,
Love that had her to wife ?
Nay, see, from that sweet strife,
 How Life lies bleeding !

STOLEN WATERS

"But he knoweth not that the dead are there."



P the grassed hollow, and down the
deep hill,
Sweet-heart that would not, to sweet-
heart that will,
Now that I draw you, enfold you, and
hold you
Warm to my heart, how the hurt heart
lies still !

Tired eyes leap open, and lips bear a boon,
So loving so late that they loved me not soon,
So eager and wistful in tender surrender,
While cresting the ricks come the rays of the moon.

Round goes the wind, and the dark branches saw ;
Out on the gables the weather-vanes flaw :
Underfoot,—what is it, Dearest, thou fearest ?—
Run the white rabbits like ghosts in the straw.

SYSTOLE : DIASTOLE



DAY-BREAK creeps
From the heart of the hill ;
The fields are chill,
Where the reaper reaps ;
Ere the birds awake, while the dew
lies still
My love is the sloth of a pain that
sleeps.

Noon at crest,
And the hills in heat ;
The swallows are fleet,
But the reapers rest :
Shadows of corn lie over their feet,
My love is a shadow against my breast.

Night returns—
To the reaper rest,
To the bird its nest
In her woods and ferns :
Earth is a shadow beneath night's breast,
My love is the light of a fire that burns.

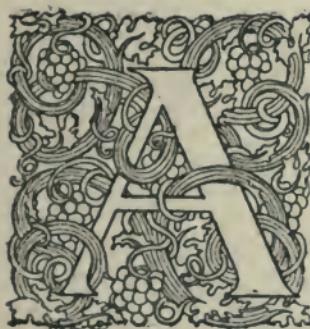
Daylight breaks
From the heart of the hill ;
Earth lies chill
Whom the night forsakes ;
Ere the birds arise, while the dew lies still,
My love in my heart is a pain that wakes.







THE CORN-KEEPER



BLIGHT came into the corn by night ;
He seemed an angel in God's sight.

All the corn-tops looked at him ;
Dark he stood on the moon's rim.

Out of the farm a child's soul
Came, and into the moonlight stole.

Shadowy hands reached over the wheat
And fell upon the child-soul's feet.

“ My body sleeps in a warm bed,”
He looked over the corn, and said ;

“ I am sent to gather dreams,
“ In among the white moonbeams,

“ White moonbeams, all in a row :
“ I must be back at the first cock-crow.

“ What shall I take, and put in the head
“ Of my warm body in his warm bed ?

“ I must fashion a dream for him,
“ Ready before the moon gets dim.”

Said the Blight, “ Then take my hand,
“ Come with me through the corn-land !”

“ Is it not too far to go ?
“ Shall I be back before cock-crow ?”

“ Not too far, and not too near ;
“ I shall have hold of your hand, my dear.”

Said the child, “ Before I was born,
“ God was good to my father’s corn

“ Night and day, from His Home’s great height.
“ Are you the angel on guard to-night ?”

Quoth the other, “ Wherever I go,
“ I am a sort of a scare-crow.”

Laughed the child, “ Why that’s fun too !
“ Make my body to dream of you !”

But a thousand whispers of wheat,
Following after the child-soul’s feet,

Cried, “ Turn back, lest the cock crow morn
“ While you are wandering over the corn !”

Then the happy soul of the child
Kissed them under their heads, and smiled,

Holding the Blight by both hands,
As they went up the corn-lands.

All of a sudden the cock crew hard,
And the watch-dog howled in the farm-yard ;
But the child's body lay too still
For a dream to be under his brain-sill.

One corn-stem they gave him to hold,
A slender sceptre headed with gold.

Never a one of them all could know
Why the corn kept kissing him so :
No one knew how, before he was born,
God was good to his father's corn.

UNDER THE ROSE



P in the shine of God's hall
 A soul heard a mother's call.
 God smiled, and said, " Go down
 " To the earth, which is a fair town ! "
 So he went by the golden stair,
 God's answer to the mother's prayer.

On the way he saw nine
 Moons in at the stairway shine ;
 And the ninth moon shone straight
 Over the threshold of life's gate.

But as he set foot therein,
 Thorns pierced his tender skin,
 For thorns trammeled the bright door
 Behind and before.

Into his mother's arms he came,
 A starry child, lovely and lame ;

And with songs and laughter sweet,
He crossed life upon marred feet ;

Marred feet through the blossoming
Of fields in spring ;

And marred, too, when like flocks to fold
Came the corn-fields gold ;

More marred when, for the land's sake,
Came the first snow-flake.

But though summer, while he lay
Under the rose, God heard men say,
“ What strange mirth the lame child knows,
“ Under the rose ! ”

For he dreamed that, while he slept,
An angel came to his feet and wept,
And from lips, that made them sweet,
Left warm kisses on his feet.

It might be, blown by the sun and breeze,
The falling rose petals made these,—

So long he would lie with eyes close,
Under the rose.

Howbeit, when he had to die,
Breath of the rose came by :

And he said, “ The roses beat
“ Warm upon my face and feet ! ”

“ Sharp thorns life’s threshold bore :
“ Are there roses at death’s door ? ”

Then, at the last, he was aware
Of again the same gold stair,

As to death’s threshold he came,
Child-hearted, lovely and lame.

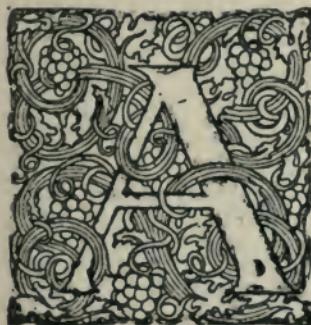
More thick was the thorn’s blossoming
Than of fields in spring,

In petals falling about his feet,
Sweet, sweet, most sweet,

Kissing the wayworn feet that came
Lovely and lame ;

Petals and blossoms made of the mirth
He had gathered on earth.

THE HOUSE OF BIRTH



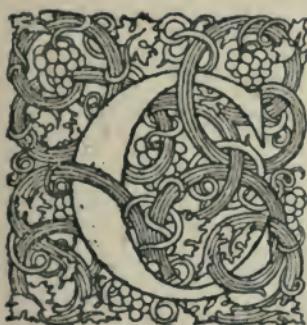
LL memories that ever were
 Leapt in Love's softly kindling fane :
 Soul throned in sense as fire in air,
 Amid these kissings, and this pain,
 As up scorched airs, majestic, great,
 The orbed fire takes its height and
 springs,
 From bright burned bodies sprang the state
 Of meeting souls and clasping wings.

The mute delirium of their eyes
 Made, in a mystery grown near,
 Wild asking, and wild sweet replies,
 " How came you here ? " " How came you here ? "
 And, as the greatening wonder grew,
 A third soul stirred where two souls met,
 To hear their endless askings, " Who
 " That hath not been, but shall be yet ? "

* * * *

Deep in within the marriage doors,
There waited, wonderfully eyed,
A human soul fresh for Life's shore,
To watch white nine moons glide.

TO A CHILD, MICHAEL



CHILD of much joy, and of such meed
of grief
As must be due,
Where mortals hold their fief,
To-day there fall, down with the
falling leaf,
Out of the heavenly blue,
Beautiful names for you.

Heaven's Eye bade them go
To the little land below :—

Light not, nor check not speed,
Till you come to a child in need,
Gazing with unlearned eyes
On the new world's surprise.

Michael, with his good sword,
Bends down to you ;
His own name doth accord
For a crown to you.
O, Michael, fit these arms
With high angelic charms !

Thine eyes did see our earth
 Come wailing to the birth,
 At the Creative nod ;
 And in the deeps of space
 Saw fall those tears of God,
 Which, kindled at His Face,
 Since the event
 Shine, stars, amid our saddened element.

We look unto the stars :
 God's grief wears steadfast still,
 A peace amidst our wars,
 A light upon our ill,
 The shadow of His pain is our sea-guide
 Across life's dubious tide :
 Love wills, so suffering, to endure and to abide.

Michael, since thine angelic heart knows pain
 So near the Father's side,
 Touch thou the little brain
 With thy bright finger-stain ;
 And afterwards provide
 Such heavenly griefs as unto us joys are,—
 Light to his life, star calling unto star !





THE SONG OF THE THREE KINGS



HIS is the song of the Kings,
Who watched by the eastern sea :
“Earthward Orion swings ;
“When will the warning be ?

“The chamfron-bells of our camels
“Are jangled and chimed in stall :
“They chafe at the harness-trammels.
“When will the faring fall ?

“God liveth for ever and aye ;
“In the night He is very nigh :
“But at daybreak we fast and pray,
“Lest the sign of His Sign pass by.”

So each King bowèd, and prayed
To know when the Sign should be :
Till the first King lifted his head,
And cried to the rest, “I see !

“I see a Star. It is dim
“With vapour of censers swung
“By shawm-voiced cherubim,
“Palm-waving of wings among.”

“ The vision, beholden afar
 “ Of Balaam, Sceptre and Rod.
 “ The bright and the morning Star :
 “ The Sign, and behold, 'tis God ! ”

So the first King mounted in awe,
 And hasted to go from thence ;
 And fair in his train men saw
 Offering of frankincense.

But the second King had sight
 Of a Star on the hills low down
 And the rays of its golden light
 Rose up like a kingly crown.

And he cried, “ Behold a King
 “ Is coming to rule all lands ;
 “ He shall cover the north with his wing,
 “ And shadow the south with his hands.”

So he mounted in haste, and passed
 With a company manifold ;
 Whose camels, from first unto last,
 Went laden with gifts of gold.

But the last King bowèd his head,
 “ Lo, yonder I see arise
 “ A Star from its sea-worn bed,
 “ Snow-wan to the withering skies ;

“ With never a kingly ray,
 “ And never a censer swung,
 “ But a beam thrown either way,
 “ And a beam to the earthward hung.

“ And to Earth, with the endless pain
 “ Of her seas, are the feet of the star ;
 “ And Heaven, with his stores of rain,
 “ Weeps over the arms stretched far.”

So he mounted with beating of bells,
 And running and toil of breath :
 “ O, Earth, a token that tells
 “ Salvation cometh of Death.

“ Yet blessed be God for this : ”
 (He laded his train with myrrh.)
 “ The wealth of my gift, I wis,
 “ Shall be for a sepulchre.”

Now blessed be the kingly boons
 They bring from the eastern sea !
 Nigh nine are the Maiden’s moons ;
 Nigh must the bearing be.

THE "CHRIST-BRIDE"



OWED she was, as a burdened mule,
Wizened, and furrowed, and crutched
beside :

" Ho ! " cried the children running from
school,
"Gammer Garu, the old christ-bride!"

So bent, so bowed was Gammer Garu,
Shadow made mist of the fair old face ;
Jeering, gibing, none of them knew
In the age of the eyes what a smile had place.

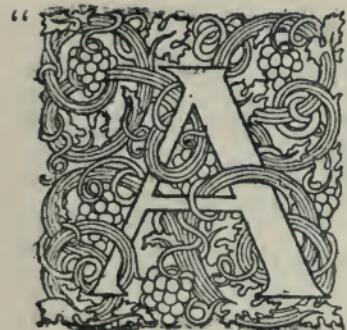
"Gammer Garu ! witch, Gammer Garu !"
By the village cross to the closed church door ;
From many a scoff, and a stone or two :
Then back to the half-thatched hut on the moor.

After her, on to the sweet wild heath,—
"Gammer Garu ! witch, Gammer Garu !"
She gazed on down to the hovel beneath ;
"What grief," she thought, "if the bridegroom knew!"

O, the smile, as she clicked the latch !
It lighted her face like an aureole.
But what a sight for the judges to catch :
Gammer Garu must have sold her soul !

What ! is there room in this hutch for two ?
Yes, for they sit down side by side.
Nearly blind is Gammer Garu,—
Gammer Garu, the dear Christ-Bride.

KING BAGDEMAGUS' DAUGHTER



H, weak, and ah, sweet."
 " And ah, strong, and ah, bitter :
 " Never were loves as ours so meet,
 " Nor kisses fitter."

But, " Ah, weak, and ah, sweet ! "
 He crossed her brow, and he crossed her
 breast ;

And knelt, and kissing he crossed her feet,
 Bidding them rest.

But, " Ah, strong, and ah, bitter ! "
 She knelt, and, bracing his girdle round,
 Kissed his sword, with its hard glitter ;
 Kissed, at his feet, the ground.

And said she—" This is a strange woe,
 " For you aim high, but you aim wrong :
 " And I cry to our Christ, of the way you go
 " To a Christ bitter and strong.

" Our Christ that was, on the day we wed,
 " But only mine now must He be ;—
 " The Christ you kissed at my bed's head,
 " Or ever you kissed me ?

“ But ah, weak, and ah, sweet,

“ And ah, strong, and ah, bitter

“ Such meetings, my love, are they all unmeet ?

“ Are partings fitter ? ”

But ah, widow, and ah, bride !

He mounted his steed, and he made to go ;

And as stone she stood, with her arms wide ;

And he loved her so !

Ah, weak, and ah, sweet !

And ah, strong ! and ah, bitter !

Never were loves as theirs so meet,

Nor kisses fitter.

LOVE AND LIFE



LOVE, Love, brief life we have to live;
 Long centuries are ours for dying !
 Life was never learned,
 Ere Death cried " Give ! "
 Death seemed earned
 Without the trying.

Ah, Love, Love, make no moan,
 Fold up the wedding raiment !
 Brief joy Life borrows,
 Small Love's loan :
 Who, then, sorrows
 At repayment ?

You, Love, for Life's sake ? such a keep-sake
 As you deemed it ?
 You, Life, for Love's sake ? or the sleep's sake,
 Where you dreamed it,—
 In your breast, in your arms, of your heart's own making :
 Till the sorrow came with waking ?

Life fails, fails
To bring to pass the vision
Of the blind warm wooing,
Where taint of sorrow fell not :
Love's heart ails,
Or is clothed in self-derision ;
Why it burns, where it yearns, to whom sueing,
It can tell not.

O, sad-eyed, will ye never cease entreating
Each the other's gaze, whether known, whether strange ?
Whereso'er ye range
Time can bring no clearer meeting ;
For, hearts being bound, we burn,
And feet being lame, we yearn
And eyes being blind, we learn
Through tears, whose stream grows single,
To melt, and meet, and mingle.

BURIED TREASURE



DEAREST heart to me on earth,
 That beats upon my own,
 How shall Time gather up your worth,
 Or Love for Time atone ?

Tho' Memory, pushing back and back
 Through all days that are gone,
 Finds your face ever on the track,
 Your heart to lean upon ;

Yet down the ways of far-off days
 A guardian-shape she finds,
 Who looks at her with darkened gaze,
 And binds while she unbinds.

Her face is still as covered wells
 Grown separate of use,
 And o'er its stirless wisdom dwells
 Inviolable truce.

On light-locked lips, unswept apart,
Old laughter holds its breath,
As though at her unbeating heart
Life's dream lay near to death.

Her face is worn, her eyes are shorn
Of light, she counts not gain :
Yet lonely, is she not forlorn,
She feedeth not on pain.

The tender dreams that died of old,
The visions of the young,
Lie buried in her bosom cold,
Unuttered on her tongue.

The autumn-spirit of her breath
Strips Life's pale solitudes,
As the keen north wind strips for death
The lamentable woods.

With troubled lips of fear and doubt,
To that untroubled face,
Breathes Memory half-lost sayings out,
As in a shrouding-place.

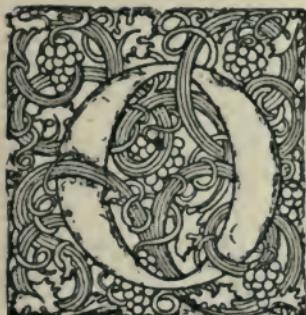
And leans a brow of weariness,
And looks of dulled surprise,
Toward the passive lips that press
Her unacquainted eyes.

O, Memory, that holds so much
The sweet things of my dear,
Which yet my heart may taste and touch,
What sweet things have we here ?

All that kind Memory lets remain,
Beneath her hiving wings,
Well would Love give to have again
Love's old forgotten things.

LORD PARAMOUNT

(FOR TWO DRAWINGS BY C. H. SHANNON)



N all the township's weary face
 One weight of heat, that falls and falls;
 The water, stagnant to its place,
 Sucks at the fever-stricken walls.

Dull grumblers from the loading crane,
 The mill-hands loiter at the fence;

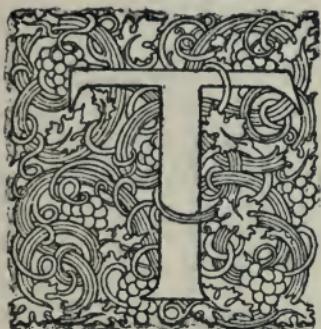
Above black barges stacked with grain
 Stands the dark reckoner, Pestilence.

Oh, doubly bondsmen ! while the day
 A soft delirious murmuring yields :
 While to the town gates comes the neigh
 And whinny of the wind-combed fields !

But he, of those broad lands the one
 Lord Paramount, his head declines,
 Drunk with the summer and the sun,
 Amid the virgins of the vines !

AUTUMN LEAVES

(TO THE PICTURE BY SIR JOHN MILLAIS)



HE day her robe of light doth soft undo,
 All heaven lies hollow to a note of ease,
 The wind stays quiet in the topmost
 trees
 Spell-bound on the horizon's walls of
 blue.

Staunch'd of its wounds, the day's end
 leans unto
 Its rest, and drains Life's sleep-draught to the lees,
 While through the multitudinous silences
 Come thrush-calls in the cool like vocal dew.

Young girls, with tired faces, from the ground
 Heap up their playtime pile, imperative ;
 As who should cry " Kill Time, let him not live ! "
 They bring burnt-offering of the year's decay :
 The earth seems waiting for their feet : around,
 Slowly in mellow endings dies their day.

THE SCHOOL OF PAN

(A PICTURE BY SIGNORELLI)



ATHER of fleece and fold and wilderness,
 Pan, pastoral lord of all, rock, rill, or lawn,
 Like lured birds to the piper's whistling drawn,
 All feet that to thee fealty confess
 Attend or come. Here in thy palm's caress
 Sleeps reed-grown Syrinx ; here the rough-eared faun,
 And shepherds, grey from many a mountain dawn,
 With feet flower-shodden to thy pastures press.

Darkens the face divine : thou hear'st among
 The hills, or soft across the blossoming mead,
 Echo unburden her melodious tongue
 In signal to the summoning of thy reed :
 " No : not till of thy godhead thou art freed,
 Over whose front the moon her cusps hath hung ! "

THE DEAD MISTRESS

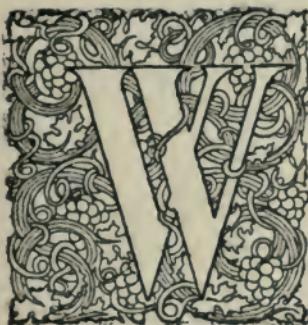


OW she lies dead: her hands that wove
in spells
Around my life, my soul, my every sense,
Are folded to her breast in soft pretence
Of piety: her lips where silence dwells,
Her eyes, where blindness sits at covered
wells,

Renounce their love of me. She is gone hence:
Her body's beauty, like a broken fence,
Leaves truth to trespass in life's ruined cells.

How like a vacant house I find you, sweet:
Entering I see the swept and garnished floors;
My eyes meet, in the mirrors of my dream,
Memories of things that time no more restores.
O, chill bound hands, unserviceable feet,
How proud, how wicked does your dead love seem!

HOLY MATRIMONY



ITHIN the whispering marriage-doors,
which close
To the glad bridegroom's face, they draw
the bride ;
Love's listener he stays, and hears inside
Honeyed hands part the petals of his
rose.

Over the throat the unfastened hair now flows,
And now the white reluctant garments slide :
Then hush on hush ; and O, the door is wide,
Moon-washed, pearl-paven as the bridegroom goes !

Into what garden hath he come, what tomb ?
There is a gazing sorrow in this place ;
A withered fragrance breathes against his face,
Cold dews of lost kind kisses faintly shed :
Before the couch, curtained in tender gloom,
Crowned round with roses a slain youth lies dead.

THE MODERN PROTEUS

I



O, Proteus, pilgrim in each vain disguise,
 Seeking new means to cheat himself
 anew,
 Striving to make those burdenous bands
 undo
 By which strong Fate would cause him
 to be wise :

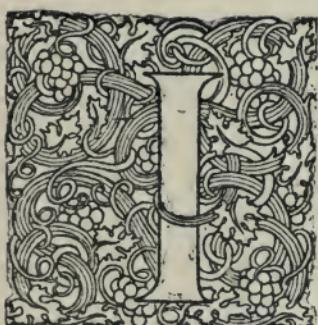
Ah ! never can be hid from his own eyes
 The self which ever binds him, making true
 All fancied cheats : alas, too few, too few
 Those covert paths from truth, which men call lies !

Too tyrannous a God hath made man's bones
 A prison round him, and his dust a snare !
 Yea, by the very lies he lives he owns,
 "I cannot rid me of my first despair,
 "That I, through all my changes, Proteus am,
 "With sorrow for my sire, and shame my dam !"

So, for self-burial, to each fresh embrace
He falls ; yet still would have himself half known,
While half not known ; and partly would leave shewn,
Yet partly hid, the shame of his soiled face.
Or, if he thinks laughter will trap the chace,
Will laugh to lure a new love for his own ;
And, while the laugh runs, will call sorrow flown,
Who follows after him at even pace.

Thus o'er self-knowledge will he fling disguise,
Till Time's hands cross upon the dial once more,
Or half acquaint love's unacquainted eyes
With grief which still stays hidden as before :
Crying toward the heart that sees him bleed,
" Know that I need you, but not why I need ! "

SEPARATION



"Verily Death is This"

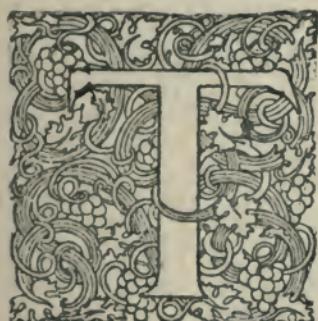
HEARD your voice, you told
Of the past that could not die ;
For the years had your face to fold,
And my spirit your eyes for skies
To behold life by.

And still, as we clasped, you told
Of a future that never can be,
Now the grave has your face to fold,
And my spirit your ghost, life's most
Grown cold for me.

You were my eyes in the past ;
Of the future can you not see
How you, my lost, are the last
Help God drew apart from my heart,
And cast from me.

We part for a little space,
Till the whirlwind trumpets blow :
When we meet at the Judgment-place
You will pass, oh, strange, oh, change !
A face that you will not know !

THE VOICE OF THE BELOVED



HE voice came in last night, and said
 “Have pity on me, for I am dead !
 “And lonely is my narrow bed ;
 “And nowhere near me lies your
 head.”

“No arms are round me in the cold,
 “No kisses here are bought or sold ;
 “Here, is within the sullen mould,
 “The door is shut, and nothing told.”

My voice reached back at dead of day,
 (Dear, could it have a sadder say ?)—
 “Your body you have put away,
 “Safely into the quiet clay ;

“But here no empty bed I hold ;
 “Arms wind me, yet my heart is cold ;
 “And kisses here are bought and sold,
 “Where doors are shut, and nothing’s told.

“ Like water strained into a sieve,
“ Wants, wasteful and imperative,
“ Daily pass through me, crying ‘ Give ! ’
“ Have pity on me, for I live !

“ The body stays to take its toll,
“ The strong hours threaten or cajole ;
“ While rust and moth corrupt the whole,
“ And thieves creep in and steal my soul.”

Again the voice came near, and said,
“ I pity you, for you are dead !
“ And lonely is the common bed,
“ When near you lies another head.”





THE HOUSE-BUILDERS



WATCHED where against the blue
The builders built on the height :
And ever the great wall grew
As their brown arms shone in the
light.

Trowel and mallet and brick
Made a wedding of sounds in the air :
And the dead clay took life from the quick,
As their strong arms girdled it there.

Hour by hour as they sped,
Their strength went into the wall ;
And the scaffolding grew as it fed
On the sweat that their limbs let fall.

Did not the Tyrannies scoff,
In the halls of their heavenly wit,
On them the fathers thereof,
And on me the holder of it ?

For I was weary to death ;
Weary of noise and light ;
Weary of drawing breath,
And weary of having sight.



And I, at the death-wish then,
 Stood looking upon it all,
When one of the living men
 Fell screaming down from the wall.

Once he turned where he fell,
 And then lay still on his side,
(I looked at him out of hell)
 And his strong throat sobbed as he died.

Ah ! had I but laid my heart
 On his for a moment's beat,
Pressed palm upon palm apart,
 And covered his feet with my feet,

Had I but taken his head
 To mine, and willed my will,
I could have lain there dead,
 And he have been living still !

When wilt Thou grant, O Lord,
 The gift that I let go by,
When I could not steal reward
 From under a dead man's eye ?

FAILURE



HEN you are dead, when all you could
not do
Leaves quiet the worn hands, the weary
head,
Asking not any service more of you,
Requiting you with peace when you
are dead ;

When, like a robe, you lay your body by,
Unloosed at last,—how worn, and soiled, and frayed!—
Is it not pleasant just to let it lie
Unused and be moth-eaten in the shade ?

Folding earth's silence round you like a shroud,
Will you just know that what you have is best :—
Thus to have slipt unfamous from the crowd ;
Thus having failed and failed, to be at rest ?

O, having, not to know ! Yet O, my Dear,
Since to be quit of self is to be blest ;
To cheat the world, and leave no imprint here,—
Is this not best ?

THE DEAD COMRADE



E left it in the quiet way,
 Nor ever kissed the fair slain head,
 Whose dead face said to the young day,
 " How many deaths ere thou be dead ? "
 What part had you of yea or nay
 In man's blood then, since yours was
 shed ?

How little we one hour ago,
 Who watched the crawling miles of heat
 Stretch themselves white before our feet,
 Thought to be parted where a row
 Of small pines let their branches meet
 Across the way we had to go.

'Twas but twelve paces through the cool ;
 And yet you left the sunlight then
 For ever ; and had looked you full
 On earth, and friends' eyes ; and with men
 Had nothing more to do, so sped,
 By that black arrow in your head.

How there we struck the hidden foe
 To ambush till God's Judgment Day,
 Hard by the pine trees in a row,
 Served not to move you anyway.
 Your voice seemed a great while ago
 Down the white past ; and all to-day,

Where we rode on, the blanched way grew
 Like years 'twixt me and that last look,
 Half-startled, when the arrow took
 And in a moment backward threw
 Your body to the earth ; and you
 Were as some fevered dream that shook
 My blood, and passed a hand of age
 Across my this day's pilgrimage.

After a mile I did not care
 What the day's ending needs must bring ;
 Defeat or victory, all seemed bare
 Of good, or any after thing.
 The white dust lay upon your hair ;
 Deep in your forehead was Death's sting.

To-day you talked, how gilded spurs
 Would be a pleasant thing to feel
 Full soon start ringing at your heel.
 Now you lay dead among the firs :—
 Thus I, while grief's first year of years
 Went by, and there began to steal

Forgetfulness of some met phrase,
 A trick of speech, across my love
 That had so watched it in waste days.

Also when I drew off my glove,
 To see my hand was flesh, not bone,
 I could not knit it with your own.

Alas! (it seemed) how utterly
 Was use flown from the love we knew ;
 So service had gone out of me
 That there was nothing I might do.

Now soon the battle was to be :
 You were not to be there.—That grew

A double death. So dull of head
 I got, there scarcely went a thread
 Of blood about me when they sprung
 The cry of battle ; and my tongue
 Made a sad clapper to my wit.
 I said, “ Now I must hit and hit

“ These poor clowns’ heads about, till cease
 “ Of some sort come, and I get peace.”

Whereat once more I could behold
 Your face turned up against the light ;
 Dust on the hair, and the lips cold,
 And the eyes covered up from sight.

Then rose, stark sudden in my ears,
 Your voice amid the shattering spears ;
 Your fair hair waved, and down a glade
 Of mown men went your fair white blade,

Pointing me which to strike: a look—
Your face became their Doomsday book,
Wherein, before each blow, I read
The names of men to be made dead.

Now we sit victors of the day,
And my brain questions of the past,
If still, along the quiet way
You lie, as when I saw you last,
Having no part of yea or nay
With us, or what strange look locks fast
Its knowledge on this latter end
Of battle, and of me thy friend.

A TIDAL RIVER



IP-WEDDED lie the waves at hush :
Down to the channel's edge there crush
Woods looking on with still regard :
The estuary holdeth hard
Its call, thro' hollow windings, barred
By banks of shoal, and flowering rush.

Wild barrens are on the water's face,
Wide leagues, which have no resting place.

By narrow creeks, where rivers are,
The sea creeps in, and finds a star,
Lost, lost among shore-woods afar,
And folds it in a loved embrace.





THE QUEEN'S BEES



AM a poor man, and my lot
 Is but this well-trimmed garden-plot,
 With small bright borders set thick
 with stocks,
 Where the red bean runs, and the lark-
 spur rocks
 To the great upstanding holly-hocks,
 Those heavenward ladders by which in a row
 Roses footing for angels go,
 The larger, the farther down they grow.

I am a poor man ; little ease
 I get, or wealth from my toil with these ;
 Little market, and little money, —
 Here where the Queen's gold-girdled bees
 Come day by day to steal my honey.
 Round their bodies hang girdles of gold,
 At quest for the Queen their hearts are bold,
 For every one in the land is told
 They shall not be caught, or bought, or sold,

But shall carry back their store to the lips
 Of our lady the Queen, where she sits and sips,
 With a golden spoon in her finger-tips,
 And gold hair flowing away to her hips.

I am the man on whom the Queen
 Reached her lily-white hand to lean
 Its weight, while high on her throne she sat,
 Letting her red lips laugh at that ;
 And her mercy all men marvelled at.
 I have a lily ; great drops of dew
 Everyday stand in it anew,—
 Five sweet diamond eyes they make,
 Looking up from a milk-white lake ;
 Looking the whole bright day-long through,
 Till the Queen's bees find a way thereto.

If I pour poison into its cup,
 A hundred bees will carry it up,
 By cedared terraces, alleys of pine,
 And gardens purple with mulberry and vine,
 Where the cone-thatched honey-cots build in a line.
 They will carry it softly and well,
 Lay it to rest in its waxen cell :
 Then, when the Queen tastes—who can tell ?

Her lily-white hand that reached so low,
 Her rose-red lips that were laughing so
 Because of the favour they could bestow :—
 Shall I not on a certain day,

Lily-white hand, and red lips repay,
Humbly, after a poor man's way ?
I will sway her body to what I fashion,
I will kiss her throat and her waist with passion !
Her reins shall be moved because of me ;
She shall tremble and struggle, and not be free
From a horror she knows yet shall not see !
One day—God's good—and the thing shall be !

Then would I give, Ah ! how much money,
To see her face as she tastes the honey ?

HOMeward BOUND

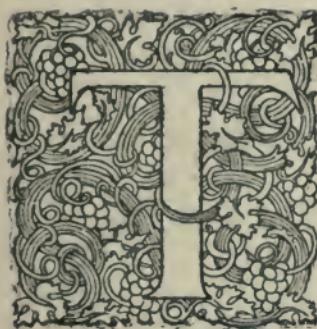


ACE of delight, recall of love,
Sea-frontage of the pleasant isles,
The sunlight strikes our sails above,
And night draws in the leeward miles.

We bring you visions of the south,
Sea-dreams of many a bathing star,
From many a moon-white river's mouth,
We, travellers waveworn from afar.

With overhead the light grown grand,
On sails that clutch the homeward breeze:
And lo ! the dipping of the land,
And heart's-ease of the harboured seas.

THE KEEPSAKE



HREE men sailed by the homeward way,
 By the homeward way o'er the white-flowered foam;
 And over the long ship's side leaned they,
 And the word and the way were home.

And the first said, "Oh! though the word be 'wait,'
 " And the spring wear out, and the year wear on,
 " I've a maiden who keeps to her maid's estate!"
 Said the third, "Do you think so, John?"

" Think? I know! On the old land's end
 " In her garden high over the sea,
 " Where I planted my love a white flower to tend,
 " 'I am thine, I am thine!' said she."
 " Now day by day, as she walks to the door,
 " She watches the white flower grow;
 " And kissing its sweet blooms o'er and o'er,
 " She swears to be mine, I know."

Then the second one said, "Though the time be late

"And the sun creep south and the Pleiads grow dim,
"I've a maiden who's true to her maid's estate!"

Said the third, "So you think so, Jim?"

"Think? I know! When the ship's white wing

"Was to carry us out to sea,

"I brought for my Love a young linnet to sing:

"'I am thine, I am thine!' sang she.

"And there's never an hour in the day, I'll engage,

"But she waits by the window sill,

"And whistles to him, through the bars of his cage,

"And swears to be my Love still."

Said the third, "I bet, though the sails be wet

"With sleet and snow, and the daft winds blow,

"That the maid I met will be my maid yet."

Said the two, "Oh! so *you* think so!"

"Think? *I know.* Oh, the honey of the minute,

"The wind lay and laughed to the land and the sea;

"No lily for my Love, for my Love no linnet;

"But a bud and a bird there'll be!"

"Oh, keep, bud, keep! and little bird sleep!

"While my Love lives, and is true for my sake;

"Till against my heart shall my Love's heart leap,—

"Then little bud blow, and young bird wake!"

So these three sailed by the homeward way.

By the homeward way o'er the white-flowered foam ;
Till the land's face came thro' the haze of a bay,
And the face of the land grew home.

“ Have you tended my lily ? ” the first of them cried,

“ In your garden high over the sea ? ”

“ Oh, I tended your lily ; your lily it died.

“ Now don't come a-kissing of me ! ”

“ Oh, my Love,” cried the second, “ And where is the
linnet

“ That whistled so sweetly all day ? ”

Quoth she, “ Why, I opened his cage for a minute,

“ And he whistled himself away ! ”

But the third and his Love clung face on face,

And the Love-child leapt in the womb ;

Was not the bird in its nesting-place,

And the bud near bloom ?

So hope came home to the honey of the minute,

The wind lay and laughed to the land and the sea ;

No lily for his Love, for his Love no linnet,

But a bud and a bird there'll be !

CHALLENGERS



LL voices that ever were,
Were my challengers to war ;
Nothing did I not dare,
Man ever dared before.

Mountain and sea and sky
Reared targe against my breast ;
But I baited, and beat them by,
Conquered, and took no rest ;

Though the mountains clad their thews
In harness of snow and ice ;
And the sky held fire for its use,
That smites, and that smites not twice ;

And Nature, in cold disdain
Stared down from her high place,
Questioning " What is man ? "
Till I wrote it over her face.

For she raved " I am changeless, I."
And I answered, " I do not know
"Aught that thou hast of high,
That I cannot make more low."

Then she mocked from her stateliness
 On the short-lived ages of men,—
 Named Death ; and I answered “ Yes,
 “ I know I shall die. What then ? ”

On the seas, where I prevailed,
 On streams which I spanned or swam,
 On mountains I cleft or scaled :—
 There, what I wrought I am :

What I am, I shall become,
 Re-taken by death to birth,
 When the sounds of the seas are dumb,
 And the voices of air and earth.

When the darkness utters its cry,
 “ Wilt thou do more and dare ?
 “ Thou livest : durst thou die ? ”
 Then to the goal I'll fare.

In the womb where the shadows sit,
 I shall bide no command :
 Such pangs shall traverse it,
 Till I put forth my hand,—

Such pangs, that the bonds shall break
 Which bind me against its side ;
 I shall quicken again, I shall wake,
 I shall be as I had not died.

THE GREAT RIDE

BERLIN AND VIENNA, 1892



HERE the merciful waters roll with
endless chanting and prayer,
Fulfilled with the last thanksgiving of
the souls that have forded there,
Of those that have wrung from their
limbs the toil, and anguish, and
hate,

That have crushed and beaten them low to the scourg-
ings and scorn of Fate,

Lo, there, as but yesterday, while a continent shrilled
acclaim,

Galled, and bleeding in flank, and broken of foot there
came,

Ruined and wronged as they who bled to the gods of
old,

Martyrs to man's great greed for praise, and his lust for
gold.

Was it famine that drove them so ? Was it terror of
death or war ?—

Whate'er, they were strong to deliver the lords they had
loved of yore ;

They had toiled at the plough for their bread ; they had
fetched them life by their speed ;—

They are broken, and ruined, and dead to the carrion
gods of greed.

Their hoofs are split in the cause, their bowels are
strained for those

Who had no compassionate bowels for them as they
sank, and rose,

And staggered a further step in love and despairing
pride,

Or with broken hearts fell down, and were cursed because
they died.

Their joints and their sinews brake ; they bowed and
they fell down low,

They dropped their great wronged limbs to the water's
pitiful flow ;

They could not see, nor hear ; but with sharp indrawings
of breath,

They bent their shuddering heads and drained deep
gulps of death ;

And their shamed and shattered strength went down in
sudden accord

To the mighty assuaging charm of the Spirit that quelled
the ford.

Wave by wave as they went they were washed of their
bloody sweat,

And the burning fire of their feet was quenched as their
feet were set

In the sands of the river's bed, till they came forth
 spirit-wise
 To the inner shore of their rest, and their strong indig-
 nant eyes
 Were open to all past things and the cause wherefor
 they bled ;
 So out of their spirit-strength came voices and tongues,
 which said :
 (Ah ! lords of pleasure and greed, how plain were the
 words they spake !)
 " Hear us, O, dwellers of earth, O, you, for whose foul
 sake,
 For whose foul gain we have died, giving thanks at the
 goal attained,
 Giving a broken heart as our best, for the goal not
 gained,
 Giving you shame that our knees were spent, that our
 feet had failed
 To bring you life at your need, or health to your land if
 it ailed,—
 Shall not our shame be yours ; and our broken hearts
 and our thanks
 Condemn you more than the hoofs ye brake, or the
 bleeding flanks,
 Or the bowels we strained in pride till we died at your
 service ? Yea,
 More than these shall not this rise up in your Judgment
 Day ;—
 That we, who in your good cause had died, by the will
 of God,

By our own strong worship and will, had bowed unto
death at your nod,
(Being heroes together) are dead because with a treach-
erous trust
You goaded us on to our death,—for life, nor for love,
but for lust!—
Trusted our pride, and accepted our love and our courage
to bear;—
Broke us, and beat us to dust, for mere clamour, and
rumour of air;
For a gambler's prize (were ye poor?), for a name, for
the nod of a king!
Therefore, O treacherous comrades and lords, have ye
done this thing!
Let the thing speak loud, till you—O, Brothers, can
you but hear!—
What vengeance for blood shall be done in the battles
that soon draw near!
Captains and lords, at the word of the charge, cast low
in the race,
Dead, ere the battle blossom, with the hoof-tread deep
in the face;
There on the men of the Ride, and the sons of their
sons,
The mark of the hoofs, and the trampling of the Terrible
Ones.

PRISONER OF CARISBROOKE



N the well-house by Carisbrooke,
 Beside the wheel and the winding-gear,
 Three hundred feet in the rock you
 look,
 Down the way the delvers took
 Into the earth for the well-water.

Turning the wheel by its great beams,
 A meek ass travails from year to year ;
 And the rope aches, and the windlass screams,
 And over the bucket a cold sweat streams,
 At the drawing in of the well-water.

Wheel and beast were made and born
 To wear and work at the winding gear,
 Under all lights of eve and morn ;
 And the beast and the wheel's strong beams were worn
 By the weighing in of the well-water.

God in His mercy maketh dumb
 Earth's lower sorrows to man's ear ;
 Yet spake the ass, as he turned the drum,
 " Now youth is ago, and age a-come ;
 " And Freedom were better than well-water ! "

Also his brain, that inwardly
 Made meanings of a distant stir,
 Had come, of putting two by three,
 To dream that other things might be
 Besides the wheel, and the well-water,

And ramparts, where the sad skies kissed
 The tops of the high juniper.
 For which things one day he was missed,
 (How sped, or whither, no man wist)
 From the dredging up of well-water.

One day, two days, and lo, appears
 Some colour of his missing fur :—
 Over the Keep's top two sad ears,
 Wagging, because no more he hears
 The drippings of the well-water ;

But sees, before, an outstretched down
 Lie silent ; and, below, gives ear
 To tinklings from a busy town ;
 And loses how the shadows frown
 About the wheel and the well-water.

Wherfrom most rudely called to earth,
 Forced back to trudge the ways that were,
 Divided from his meek mute mirth,
 Compelled into the wheel's stern girth,
 Again he trod for well-water.

But never as in the old days, when
 No vision touched or eye or ear ;
 For day by day, in his dark pen,
 He gazed, from the reproach of men,
 On Freedom better than well-water.

Yea, Freedom ! underneath the yoke,
 He felt the ancient hand of Her
 Who trained his fathers : so, when spoke
 Her voice against his heart, it broke
 From treadings at the well-water.

And clashing up the stony steep
 To that high Pisgah-top, from where
 First he beheld the broad downs sleep,
 He bade his glad worn body leap
 From bondage of the well-water.

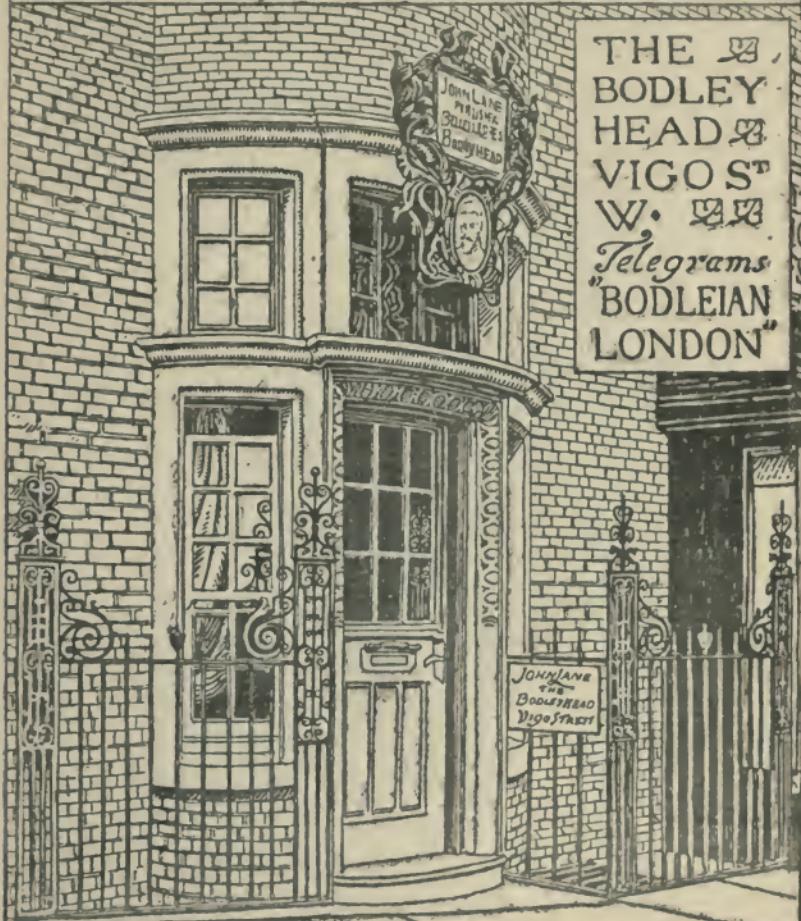
It was but one long leap to go,—
 And, dead to all the griefs that were,
 His quiet body down below,
 Where hazels and dropped acorns grow,
 Found Freedom better than well-water.





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